MUSIC AS A PROFESSION FOR THE BLIND.

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Music, when properly taught, is the most remunerative profession for the Blind, and yet in all countries many who have tried to earn a livelihood by music have failed. Their failure is due to the following reasons:—

1. In the selection of pupils for the profession, the musical ear rather than the mental capacity was considered. 2. The physical and intellectual powers of the musical students were not developed. 3. The musical instruction and practice were insufficient, both in quantity and quality. 4. The opportunity of hearing music in its highest forms was not afforded them. 5. They were not trained in the art of teaching, especially in the best method of giving instruction to seeing children. To become successful in the profession, it is necessary for the Blind to have opportunities of instruction, practice, study, and hearing music equal to the seeing with whom they will have to compete in the open market. A National College of Music for the Blind in any country should afford the pupils opportunities equal to those enjoyed by the seeing in the best Conservatories of Music in that country. In all branches of the art, the services of the very best Professors should be secured. If the blind musician is to rise above mediocrity, systematic musical instruction in childhood is indispensable, and good instruction will avail very little, unless the practice is under constant and judicious supervision.

No amount of teaching, even the best, can take the place of regular, intelligent study and practice. It is commonly supposed that the Blind are indefatigable in their efforts to learn, especially music. After many years experience, however, I am convinced that it requires more effort to obtain thorough *systematic* work from blind than from sighted students. Teachers of the Blind not only require patience, tact, and ability, but they need a large reserve of enthusiasm to arouse and call into activity the dormant faculties of their pupils.

No musical talent, however great, justifies the neglect of mental culture. Sighted teachers of music can, and often do, succeed without broad culture; but with the Blind, special

intellectual development is indispensable. The musical education must be based upon a thorough general education, solid, well-balanced, and comprehensive. The aim should be to develop the powers of observation, train the reasoning faculties, cultivate the power of clear and concise expression, and stimulate a love of literature and good reading.

A practical system of education which has for its object to make the Blind independent and self-sustaining, must be based upon a comprehensive course of physical development. As a class, the Blind have much less vitality than the seeing, and this lack of physical power leads to indolence, timidity, and discouragement. The Blind must be roused from their willingness to depend upon others, and made to believe in the possibility of independence and success. It is the lack of energy and invincible determination, not the want of sight, that has caused so many failures among the Blind.

Parents and friends can do much at home to assist in the practical success of the Blind. As stiffness, awkwardness, and all distortions of the features detract from the best performances, free and graceful movements are essential, and with care these can be more successfully cultivated at home than at school. As a rule, there will not be more than one or two blind children in a family, and if each member of the family makes it a special duty to assist the blind child, the result will exceed their most sanguine expectations. Whoever trains a blind child to use his fingers skilfully, either at work or play, is practically preparing him for pianoforte playing, while those who encourage him by foolish praise, to drum tunes on the piano, are unfitting him for proper musical study.

Blind persons who intend to follow music as a profession must have well-disciplined minds, capable of analysing and dealing with music from an intellectual point of view. If the mental faculties have not been developed and thoroughly disciplined, the blind music teacher or organist, however well he may play or sing, will generally be a failure. Even with superior mental training, the musical instruction must be more thorough, more analytical, more comprehensive than corresponding instruction given to seeing students. The musical instruction in its several branches of harmony, pianoforte, organ, and vocal culture, should be addressed to the mind, and not merely to the ear. This is the only possible method by which musical training can be made of practical use to the Blind. The indirect instruction is scarcely less important than the direct, and the latter is by no means complete without it. Concerts, Recitals, and Lectures should be provided which will familiarise the pupils with the best works of the great masters and render their musical culture more comprehensive. At Norwood we have able Professors in every department, who give Recitals and Lectures as a part of their regular work, but in addition, our students have heard not only in the Crystal Palace and Concert Halls of London, but in the Hall of the College many of the most distinguished pianists, organists, and vocalists both of Europe and America.

It ought not to be expected that good and successful blind teachers can be trained at less cost than seeing teachers. Institutions for the Blind, even if their means are limited can, at least, have good elementary musical instruction. In the first instance this may not produce so much effect on the public as choruses learned merely by ear; but in the end, such a course would promote the truest interests of the Blind, and ensure more liberal support.

The career of sighted persons is often circumscribed by defective training in childhood. If such are the results with the seeing, with the Blind the evil effects must be much greater. When the Blind have once contracted bad habits it is difficult, I may say almost impossible, to entirely overcome them. This conclusion is based upon personal experience. In childhood I entered upon the study of music with a zeal that knew no bounds. I was ready for any amount of work, even the most tedious drudgery. Unfortunately the school where I was educated employed a teacher who was a good violinist, but not a pianist. By the time I was sixteen years of age, I had contracted a technic so faulty that years of pains-taking study, under the guidance of the best teachers, were scarcely sufficient to overcome the defects. This sad disappointmeut in the loss of the best years of my life, has exerted a controlling influence in all my endeavours to obtain a thorough training for the Blind from early childhood. If one teacher is employed for all the different departments, as piano, organ, violin, and other musical instruments, singing, harmony, counterpoint, and composition, is it reasonable to expect the blind students to compete with those who are taught by the first Specialists of the day in such Conservatories as the Royal Academy, Royal College, and Guildhall School of Music?

Without considering the defective teaching given to the Blind, it is emphatically asserted that they cannot succeed in the profession of Music; that they cannot obtain employment owing to the prejudice of the public. Beyond all question, a prejudice does exist, and unfortunately, there is good ground for it. Appointments were sought for Blind organists who possessed very little education and refinement, who had no technical development worthy of the name, and who did not understand voice development and choir-training. They knew a certain number of hymns, anthems, and choruses from the Oratorios, but these were their stock-in-trade. Of course they failed, but *their failure was ascribed to their blindness, not to their lack of education and training.*

The Braille musical notation, which is now in common use in this and all European countries, can be both written and read by the Blind with facility. Every blind child, from the beginning, should be required to read his own music. It is less difficult for a blind child to master the Braille musical notation, than for a sighted child to overcome the difficulties of the staff notation.

The Braille system for literature and music was introduced into this country by the late T. R. Armitage, Esq., M.D.

Through his wise, untiring zeal and noble generosity, every blind man, woman, and child throughout the English-speaking world can now obtain not only the best literature, but the best music in all branches of the Art. Through the ceaseless efforts of his wife and daughter, the work and usefulness of the British and Foreign Blind Association is constantly increasing.

Pianoforte tuning may not be considered a branch of the musical profession, but it is an excellent employment for the Blind, and one in which they have certain advantages. Many can be trained to become successful pianoforte tuners, when they have reached an age that renders professional training impossible. The Blind who wish to succeed as pianoforte tuners must not despise the drudgery of small details; they must serve a regular apprenticeship, and fit themselves for practical business; they must work a number of hours daily (under suitable tuition) for several years. Even if a good ear and other requisites are possessed, long tuition is necessary to bring the muscles of the hand and wrist under control.

The seeing who excel in the business go through a long apprenticeship, and we must see that the Blind have even more careful preparation. Our tuners have advantages which are not enjoyed by sighted apprentices in the pianoforte manufactory. They are taught to play, they have good instruction in singing, and their musical ear is carefully cultivated by daily choir-practice.

After a careful examination, every duly qualified tuner should be furnished with an official certificate, and tuners who cannot take the required examinations ought not to be allowed to impose upon the public. Pianoforte tuning will cease to be a good and successful employment for the Blind, unless the work is thoroughly and effectively carried out.

"Owing to the fact that there is but one blind person to one thousand seeing persons, it is a difficult matter to educate the community to discriminate between competent and incompetent blind workmen. A man possessing sight may do his work badly, yet this would not prevent another seeing man from getting employment. If a blind man attempts to tune or repair a piano, and fails to give satisfaction, it is then impossible for another blind man, however capable, to secure work in the vicinity."

The Blind cannot afford to do work which is not the best of its kind. We must raise our standard, and not be satisfied until the Blind, as a class, will consider it a disgrace to do inferior work. Our aim must be to produce earnest Christian men and women, thoroughly trained in prompt, business-like habits, well-developed physically, with impressible energy, dauntless courage, and bright hopefulness. If based upon the principles set forth in this paper, the Profession of Music in all its branches, offers great advantage to the Blind.

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